

## MORE GHOSTS!

The Superintendent of Communications, Head Office, has written :-

"Mention in your most recent newsy NEWSLETTER of Daly Waters and of ghosts has reminded me of two historical incidents of the dim past.

In the days before COM Supervisors when we were "one happy family" directed, guided, employed and transferred by a central "Radio Inspector", it fell to my lot to investigate a staff matter at Daly Waters. I sent the SCO South and took over the station pending the arrival of the new SCO. One of the first obvious jobs to be done was to clean out old records, logs, newspapers, magazines, u/s tubes, burnt out resistors etc.

Old papers were piled into a 44 gallon petrol drum serving as an incinerator and to make a good bonfire an enthusiastic COM officer assisting me suggested splashing some kerosene on the papers. Unfortunately my enthusiastic assistant selected petrol instead of kerosene - a loud "boom" resulted and there was I minus eyebrows, moustache and some skin plus a sore eye. Daly Waters was really burned into my soul.

My ghost story concerns Karumba, the old and now discarded Flying Boat Base some miles down the river from Normanton. I was there when the Prime Minister of the day and the present Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies, was heard on Radio Australia to broadcast; "It is my mournful duty to announce that Great Britain is at war with Germany".

Security measures were immediately introduced at Karumba and an armed guard mounted! As, however, the only lethal weapon on the base was a lonely .303 rifle it was necessary to make a strategic decision as to whether the living quarters or the remote transmitters should be protected; the remote transmitters won. Having completed my task at Karumba and awaiting south-bound transport I volunteered to take the first guard doggo.

The night was quiet; all was peaceful and war seemed to be and in fact was far away. There was an occasional rustle of leaves as the sea breeze gently tossed the branches of the high gum trees; an occasional wallaby collided with the wire fence that surrounded the transmitter building. At 2 a.m. I boiled the billy on a primus stove and made tea. Again all was quiet and peaceful as I "did my rounds" and inspected the grounds for intruders! As I re-entered the building to enjoy my hard earned cup of tea a "terrific crash" rent the air; the hairs at the back of my neck stood erect; I brought my trusted .303 to the ready and awaited developments. Seconds of suspense that seemed like hours followed until I realised that the handle of the billy that had been standing erect had toppled down and "crashed" against the side of the billy. I am now convinced that the greatest amplifier of sound is one's mind; you cannot even guess how much amplification my mind gave to that tinny sound.

I later discovered that the safety catch of the .303 was "on" and perhaps that was fortunate should a friend and not a foe have appeared on the scene. May the ghosts of Karumba, and Groote Island and the other Flying Boat Bases live on and may they remind us from time to time of a phase of civil flying, outstanding though it was, that will never come again."

The Superintendent of Communications, Head Office, has produced another entertaining article which will be of great interest to many :-

### BEYOND THE BLUE HORIZON

"Before the period of which Harry Gentle recently wrote so interestingly there lay another period, a period beyond the blue horizon, about which some NEWSLETTER readers might care to hear.

Like Harry Gentle, I too set out from Brisbane but from that point our stories differ. The date of my departure on this particular occasion was Christmas Day, December 25, 1934. It was a survey flight to Singapore in preparation for the first official airmail service linking Australia with England but connecting with Imperial Airways, the forerunner of B.O.A.C., which organisation already linked Singapore with the old country.

The planned route for the Australian operated link was Brisbane-Roma-Charleville-Blackall-Longreach-Winton-Cloncurry-Mt. Isa-Camoowal-Brumby Downs-Newcastle Waters (dropping mail at Anthony's Lagoon and Alexandria) - Daly Waters-Darwin-Koopang (Timor)-Rambang (Lombok Island)-Soerabaya-Batavia (now Djakarta)-Singapore. In addition occasional stops were made at Waingapoe (Soemba Island) and/or Palembang (Sumatra) for fuel. Overnight stops were made westbound at Cloncurry, Darwin and Soerabaya while eastbound night stops were made at Rambang, Darwin and Longreach. These were working men's flights with working men's wages (4/- per hour flying pay) - four full days flying each way sometimes up to 14 hours on the job with another full day's flying to follow. There was no "George", no Hosties, no meals in the air; do most of your own refuelling and much of the routine maintenance; count the bags and weigh them and load your own mail working out by rule of thumb your own weight and balance; issue passenger tickets at the smaller stopping places; pump up a tyre in 112° in the shade at Daly Waters and, by Company rules, be pleasant, shaved and neatly dressed at all times.

The Service started with a listening watch each 30 minutes by the Coastal Radio Station (VIB) Brisbane and (VID) Darwin. We transmitted on something about 6540 kcs but as the transmitters were not crystal controlled the frequency varied considerably from trip to trip and somewhat from "sked" to "sked". We always kept very strict skeds (18 and 48 minutes past the hour) and sent a long string of Vs for tuning before transmitting QTH. Between Brisbane and Roma and between Birdum and Darwin it was possible to work two-way receiving on 333 kcs. Between Roma and Birdum we sent QTH on sked but did not receive any acknowledgement. Westward of Darwin by this time a small station had been established at Koopang. Between Koopang and Rambang we sometimes worked Koopang or, with some luck, the Coastal Radio Station Darwin or Broome (VIO). Until we made contact with Palembang some 900 miles further along the route we fought with ships at sea on 500 kcs for some attention from the Coastal Radio Stations at Soerabaya and Batavia. The best method of attack there was to call madly, sometimes with an "Urgency" signal thrown in for good measure, just before the silence period ended at 18 or 48 minutes past the hour. Palembang and Singapore were essentially aeronautical stations and could generally be depended upon to be on watch and to find our spot on the dial. These

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stations also had BT DF which provided some amusement but little help. Reciprocal bearings were not unknown.

Out of the initial survey flight came some developments. After a year or so the first aeronautical station at Brisbane came into being; Darwin likewise was given somewhat improved facilities including BT DF. One of the first developments, however, arose from discussions with the PIG's Department. About this time Harold Stiff was Radio Postmaster at Camooweal. Harold had a MF transmitter and a receiver which he used to handle telegrams between Camooweal and Wave Hill, Brunette Downs, etc. These facilities were made available to give service to the "giant airliner" (a DH 86). Harold not only manned one of the earliest 'aeradio' stations in Australia; he provided at Camooweal one of the first Aerodrome Information Services and what was, I believe, the first approach to an "Advisory" Service. I have one vivid recollection of "finding" Camooweal in IIR and what would now be below-minima conditions - heavy rain and clouds down on the fence posts - only with the help of Harold's Information and "Advisory" services..... Camooweal was our breakfast stop when Westbound. After departing Mt. Isa I had but to give an ETA to Harold and sign off "FWS" to be assured that sausages and eggs were selected from the menu and ready on the table when we landed.

There came a day, July 3 1938 to be precise, when the first Dutch (KLM) service to enter Australia was due to arrive Cloncurry enroute to Brisbane. Cloncurry did not possess COM facilities. On July 1 1938 equipment and three men were loaded in-to a small aircraft (DH90) and flown to Cloncurry arriving about 1500 local. On July 3 1938, two days later, at 1600 local two-way communication plus BT DF was available for service and within a few minutes contact was established with the KLM aircraft and DF bearings passed. (I said two days later Les and I can produce evidence!!)

The second KLM service proved the value of the new station. This aircraft departed Cloncurry about 0600 local for Brisbane. At about 0900 local the aircraft struggled back to Cloncurry on DF bearings while the pilot upon landing assured us that "it is all sand there." He had, apparently, been on a track for Adelaide rather than Brisbane and had seen for the first time the Simpson Desert.

In the next issue of NEWSLETTER I should like to tell you another Lost and Found story; this time without DF. By the way did anyone tell you about the old time pilot who called the old time COM man at Melbourne and gave his position as Cape Schanck which was normal for a flight from Melbourne to Launceston. When the old time COM man said to the old time pilot: "I thought you were going to Sydney today" it was obvious that Cape Schanck was not where the aircraft should have been but was!!! Carefree days of yesteryear!!!"

From Melbourne, the Superintendent of Communications writes :-

LOST AND FOUND - WITHOUT DF

This is the "lost and found" story I promised in the last issue of NEWSLETTER; it is a story of happenings on August 26 and 27 1935 and might, perhaps, be better told under the heading of "Self Help". There is nothing heroic in the story; it aims only to show that a little thought and application of some common sense can get one out of an unusual situation.

X We had departed Singapore, as was usual, before sun-up. As also was usual at that time of day the sky was overcast but turbulence was not severe. Over Muntok, about half way through the first leg of the run and by which time we were out into sunshine a "noise" developed in one of the port engines; the few engine instruments carried in the DH 86 gave no indication that anything was amiss. The "noise" increased in intensity and a slight vibration could be felt. By throttling back each of the port motors in turn it was quickly evident that the trouble lay in the port inner.

We carried on with three motors but it soon became apparent that there was some quite serious trouble somewhere as, even with the engine now throttled back, the "noise" and vibration was noticeable. By now we were well past PNR in addition to which our only likely alternate, Palembang, was closed due fog; there was nothing left to do but press on to Batavia (now Djakarta).

In due course we landed at Batavia. Either a cylinder head gasket had blown and allowed cylinder head nuts to work loose or nuts having worked loose allowed the gasket to blow. Whatever was the base cause of our trouble does not now matter; what matters is that, as that engine turned, the defective cylinder head was bouncing about one inch and why the whole outfit did not fall apart is not for me to guess. Two cylinder head nuts were found in the cowlings while the remaining nuts were holding by one or two threads.

Whether this was a "routine maintenance" job I'm not sure. However we did much of our own routine maintenance in those days and as the nearest Engineer was some 600 miles away we set to work, and, believe it or not, the engine ran like a sewing machine when we finished about 1600 local and too late to go on to Soerabaya that evening. That was the cause of the lost and found story that now follows.

Next morning we departed at 0400 and after a very pleasant run arrived at Soerabaya soon after daylight. We refuelled, collected a few sandwiches and were away again in 19 minutes.

En route to Rambang we decided that if we could get a favourable forecast for the Koepang-Darwin leg and could be reasonably assured of making an Australian landfall before last light we would proceed to Darwin that evening. We, therefore, made a special effort to effect a quick turnaround at Rambang and this we achieved in 20 minutes.

As soon as we were clear of the land after departure Rambang we put in a request to Darwin for the desired forecast; in due course it was received and was favourable. Having studied sunset times and having assured ourselves that there was a reasonable margin of safety (assuming that the forecast was reasonably accurate) we decided that, if we could get away from Koepang within 20 minutes of landing, we would carry on and this we did.

Our "sick" motor purred; the weather was fair to good although there was high overcast and the wind on the water was stronger than expected. We took a quick double-drift sight and increased our drift allowance from 5° to 8° port. If that 8° had been 18° we might not have run into trouble.

The sun set behind us; darkness settled over us; a haze merged sea and sky into a grey blanket ahead. Australia seemed to have disappeared. ~~Our course had been set with~~

There was no doubt that we were lost and if we were to get ourselves out of the unusual situation we must do something to help ourselves; this is what was done.

Darwin was asked to send Vs and to continue to send Vs until told otherwise or his Fordson engine that drove his generator packed up. On a blank piece of paper we made a mark - Point "X". From Point "X" we set out on a track of 270° while the aircraft aerial was disconnected, the receiver very carefully tuned to VID and the gain cut back until signals were barely audible.

In due course signals began to weaken. We allowed this to continue for a while to be sure it was not due to fading. We then turned on to a track of 90° and headed back towards point "X". Signals very slowly came up. With one eye on the clock and another on the fuel gauges we carried on in an easterly direction until signals again began to drop off. Once more we turned and headed back towards Point "X" keeping a very careful note of signal strength.

Having arrived back somewhere in the vicinity of Point "X" (we hoped) it was concluded that the maximum signal strength was obtained some 10 minutes flying time to the westward of this point so we proceeded there. The decision must now be taken whether to turn North or South and although we could have been over Bathurst or Melville Islands it seemed reasonably certain that we were over the mainland; we therefore roughly calculated drift from the scrub fires and set out on a course designed to take us in the direction of Darwin. Minutes passed; more minutes passed as one fuel gauge looked very sick but believe it or not signals began to increase in strength. A few more minutes and then, suddenly, both of us saw the Darwin rotating light only a few miles dead ahead but bent at almost right angles under the smoke haze.

We landed a few minutes after 2100 some 2 hours after LTM and it was only then that we realised that, apart from the few sandwiches taken aboard at Soerabaya some 12 hours earlier, we had not eaten since the previous evening.

The mail went south next morning dead on time."